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May 18, 2023

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Re: Future Pandemic Border Travel Policies

Dear Mr. President:

As our country emerges from the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE), now is the time to develop a plan with other countries, like Canada, to ensure future alignment on travel policies. The confusing, convoluted, and disjointed policies on each side of the border presented a constant challenge for families and had a significant economic impact on both countries during the pandemic. We are still recovering from these shocks.

It was especially frustrating for my constituents who carefully followed government guidelines but were still subjected to onerous border restrictions for much of the pandemic. In 2021, the Wilson Task Force found that although pandemic border restrictions were initially touted as “collaborative and reciprocal,” there were significant and complex differences between the U.S. and Canada, adding to confusion and distrust amongst the public. Furthermore, despite the restrictive and inconsistent travel policies between our countries, the Wilson Center found no instances of a border-crossing citizen linked to a rise in COVID-19 infections and no connections to so-called “super-spreader” events. In future pandemics, the U.S. should seek every opportunity to reward those who have followed public health guidelines by making border movements as seamless as possible.

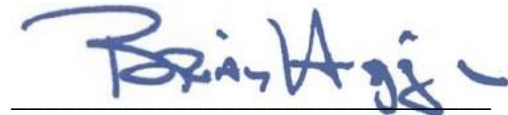
Throughout the PHE, I expressed consistent concern about the lack of coordination between the U.S. and Canada in determining pandemic travel policies and standards. Your Administration has the tools to prevent this problem in the future. For example, previous agreements like the North American Plan for Avian and Pandemic Influenza (NAPAPI) of 2007 emphasized coordination between the U.S., Canada and Mexico and recommended the use of the North American Senior Coordinating Body (SCB) to facilitate information sharing and promote rapid synchronized decision-making to minimize contradictory messages and policies. Similar past agreements, like the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America of 2005 and the Beyond the Border Declaration of 2011 (updated in 2017) all provide guidelines by which we

can facilitate future pandemic coordination with Canada. These frameworks can serve to help evaluate border policies during the COVID-19 PHE and to ensure better alignment on the movement of people and goods during future pandemics.

The NAPAPI was revisited in 2021 in light of the COVID-19 pandemic to include improved data collection and sharing and increased communication and collaboration between state, provincial, and local governments. I encourage your Administration to continue this work to better prepare for and execute future pandemic response coordination. Future work should focus on preventing the extremely frustrating experience of so many of my constituents at Land Ports of Entry at our border.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brian Higgins". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Brian Higgins
Member of Congress